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SUBJECT: CFC VISIT TO ABEICHE: MGS CONSTRAINTS AND JEM INTRANSIGENCE

REF: (A) KHARTOUM 00396
(B) KHARTOUM 00304
(C) KHARTOUM 00331

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Members of the AMIS Ceasefire Commission traveled to Abeche, Chad to receive an operations update from the local Military Observer Group Site (MGS) Commander and to engage the JEM leadership. The MGS faces severe logistical constraints, including transportation and communications, which hamper its ability to function effectively. JEM officials reiterated their continued adherence to the N'djamena (Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement) HCFA, rejection of the DPA, and demands to be consulted by the AU on a range of ceasefire- and political process-related issues. The visit offered another window on the AMIS Force Commander's strengths and weaknesses and underscored the limitations of AU political capacity. End Summary.

MGS ABEICHE NEEDS HELP

2. (SBU) On March 18, the Abeche MGS Commander briefed members of the Ceasefire Commission (CFC), including AMIS Force Commander Luke Aprezi, CFC Secretariat staff and the EU and U.S. observers, on the group site's operations and constraints. The MGS mission to liaise with Chadian and French forces, monitor cross-border refugee movement and security around their camps, and maintain awareness of rebel and militia activities is severely constrained by numerous logistical and administrative challenges. The MGS Commander outlined the lack of communications (no Internet connectivity - AMIS relies on UNHCR or local French forces to send email - and only one satellite phone), transportation challenges (only eight operational vehicles, few spare parts and scant helicopter support), and other operational obstacles (broken generators, inadequate medical support, poor accommodations, and insufficient funds to pay rent and utility bills). The MGS and Protection Force (PF) Commanders both voiced their dissatisfaction that their troops had not received Mission Support Allowance (MSA) since November 2006, further eroding morale. The AMIS Force Commander, somewhat defensively, chided the MGS Commander for his "incomplete reports" but pledged to try to improve the group site's logistical and administrative posture. (Note: PAE support does not extend to Chad, leaving the MGS to fend largely for itself. End Note.)

3. (SBU) The MGS Commander also noted that the border monitoring force envisioned under the Sudan-Chad Tripoli Agreement was being established. He remarked that Libyan forces - no mention of the type, numbers or specific equipment - have already arrived in Abeche and are using vehicles with AU (vice AMIS) markings. (Note: The CFC

Vice Chairman, French Brigadier General Sintes, noted to S/CRS Poloff that French forces in Abeche informed him that at least 20 Eritrean military personnel are currently in El Geneina, also as part of the Tripoli border monitoring force. End Note.)

JEM UNYIELDING IN ITS VIEWS ON DPA, POLITICAL PROCESS

14. (SBU) Following the MGS Commander's briefing, members of the CFC met with Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) political leaders Tadjadine Bechir Niam, Osman Ahmed Godul and Ahmed Tugod Lissan. Force Commander Aprezi noted that this was his first encounter with the JEM officials and proceeded to describe his efforts to bolster the effectiveness of the CFC, including through the creation of a Second Chamber for non-signatories. Aprezi summarized recent decisions taken in regards to streamlining the CFC and hurdles still facing the body (Ref A). He emphasized his desire for "inclusiveness" in the CFC and urged JEM participation in the Second Chamber, which collapsed in mid-February (Ref B).

15. (SBU) Niam, who serves as the JEM spokesman, representative to the AU and member of the Joint Commission (N'djamena HCFA), began his opening salvo by reiterating JEM's rejection of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and its insistence that the 2004 N'djamena HCFA remain the cornerstone of JEM-AMIS relations. He complained that since the signing of the DPA, AMIS had excluded JEM from meaningful participation in the CFC and Joint Commission. Niam argued that the signing of the DPA did not abrogate the HCFA, and that without any operational or political mechanism to communicate, JEM would remain opposed to AMIS engagement. The JEM spokesman, becoming increasingly agitated, laid the blame for "anarchy in Darfur" on the shoulders of AMIS, which he accused of complicity with the

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Government of Sudan. Furthermore, he rejected the Force Commander's CFC proposals to distribute JEM representatives only at Sector headquarters and in areas where they exercised some measure of control. (Note: As the Government continues to refuse the deployment of non-signatories to the Sector level, JEM's views on the FC's proposition is a moot point. JEM insists that it is entitled to representation throughout Darfur, as specified under the HCFA. End Note.)

16. (SBU) JEM Senior Negotiator and Chief of External Affairs Ahmed Tugod Lissan reinforced Niam's arguments and emphasized JEM's perception of AMIS' "failure to consult" and deliberate attempts to exclude the rebel group. He demanded that JEM representatives return to the field and asserted that the Force Commander's plan to place representatives only in MGS areas where they exerted control would lead to more in-fighting as rebel groups vied to expand their territories. He endorsed Niam's recommendations to AMIS, namely to (1) improve consultations with JEM; (2) formalize correspondence in writing, to include the CFC proposals; (3) reconsider the functioning of the CFC and immediately redeploy JEM representatives throughout Darfur; and (4) de-link implementation of the ceasefire with the issue of DPA signatories versus non-signatories and "concentrate on saving lives."

17. (SBU) Lissan noted that JEM was prepared to facilitate AMIS' mission as long as the rebel group had a seat at the table in accordance with the HCFA. He declared that the perpetually delayed Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) field commanders' conference in Umm Rai (Ref C) would lead to greater divisions within the movements, postulating that at least three groups would emerge, led respectively by Sharif Hariri, Khamis Abdallah and Ahmed Abdul Shafi. Lissan did not give any indication of JEM outreach to SLA rebels, though he claimed that both groups were ultimately united in their objectives. He suggested that the international community should sponsor a joint military-political conference rather than just one for field commanders, as they lack political experience and will only further confuse the situation.

18. (SBU) Regarding efforts by the AU-UN Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST) to facilitate political dialogue with the non-signatories, Lissan rejected the participation of AU Special Envoy Salim Salim

and DPA Implementation Team Chief Sam Ibok. "I have nothing against them personally," the JEM leader claimed, "but we cannot accept them as they are the ones responsible for the DPA." Lissam clarified that he did not oppose the AU's role in political mediation, just those individuals associated with the Abuja negotiations.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) The visit to Abeche provided another window on Force Commander Aprezi's strengths and weaknesses. Over the past six months, he has demonstrated sincerity in reaching out to the JEM and SLA Non-Signatories Factions (NSF), meeting with their representatives on a regular basis, traveling to their strongholds (in Umm Rai, Jebel Moon and Abeche), and pressing the Sudanese Government to accept the non-signatories' return to the Sectors. His proactive approach, however, also underlines the deficiency of AU political capacity and the linkages between the organization's political and military branches. Neither the Deputy Head of Mission nor his lone political officer in El Fasher attended the meeting (both have been repeatedly ill or otherwise absent) and there were awkward moments when the FC was drawn into political territory. In contrast to his predecessor, Aprezi has demonstrated an interest in hearing first-hand his subordinates' problems. However, he continues to delve into the weeds (e.g., giving a lengthy lecture on the necessity of documenting the MGS's generator failure) and is unwilling to delegate decision-making authority to the appropriate staff officers. End Comment.

HUME